

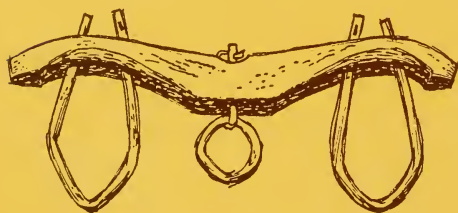
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Abraham Lincoln, His
POLITICAL Vision

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Abraham Lincoln

His Political Vision


By

EMANUEL HERTZ



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Abraham Lincoln

His Political Vision

By EMANUEL HERTZ

A careful study of Lincoln's political activities from the day he emerged as a candidate for the Assembly in Illinois to the very end of his life discloses that he regarded politics an honorable vocation. Neither his ceaseless struggle for financial independence nor the preparation of his cases ever interfered with his thinking of the political problems of the hour, and in between the trials of his cases, on the circuit, in the courtroom, in the court yard, in the country store, in the village inns, or in any place where citizens of any community who knew him assembled, all such places immediately became the forum for the discussion of the political problems of the day with Lincoln as the speaker and source of all information. Was a convention called at which Republican principles were to be transmuted into a Republican platform, Lincoln was there and delivered his Burlington speech which became a clarion call to the entire Republican party then springing into being throughout the land, and to all such as were unable to make up their minds whether to go from the disappearing Whig Party. It required a trained politician, indeed, to keep these droves of voters from the banners of Douglas with his alluring promises of union and of peace, if they but followed him.

To those who have studied the performances of the "little giant," as he was known throughout the land, how in an incredibly short time he forged to the front in the United States Senate where such men as Jefferson Davis, William H. Seward, Charles Sumner and Salmon P. Chase and other great leaders had been in the habit of controlling the destinies of the country; how he dominated the politics of Illinois and of the Middle West and how he almost persuaded the

new Republican Party, at the urging of Greeley, to nominate him as its standard bearer, it can be seen what a supreme tactician Lincoln must have been when he not only counteracted the sinister tendencies of Douglas but organized a party which, when the test came at the memorable Convention in Chicago, demonstrated that no such exhibition of political preparation, of political acumen, of political generalship, was ever witnessed in any similar political gathering before or since.

Lincoln ennobled the word "politics." He saw in politics one of the essentials of a nation's life. He saw that the nation was governed by parties and could be ruled by parties only, if political chaos was to be averted, and he took possession of the new Republican party in every corner of the land in such fashion as amazed old leaders like Thurlow Weed, Bates, David Davis, Blair and Cameron. They were all like clay in the hands of the potter. And there was Lincoln in his home in Springfield, with his plans in trusted hands, primed and prepared for every emergency and all but nominated on the first ballot. Lincoln never apologized for being a politician and a political leader. He considered it part of his duty to the State and to the Nation.

It is amazing to see how he called to his help men of eminence, if need be, and how he found among the plain people of his time, the very best helpers in his one supreme task—the saving of the Union. In one of the unpublished letters which he wrote to Simon Cameron immediately after the battle of Gettysburg, he told Cameron that at the conference as to whether Lee was to be pursued after Gettysburg, Mead and his staff were practically unanimous not to pursue the lion of the South. One commander, however,

urged pursuit and destruction of Lee immediately after Gettysburg. Lincoln wanted to know the name of that commander because he was heart and soul in sympathy with such a policy.

Another one of his unpublished letters discloses a thoroughly worked out plan of attacking the Confederacy by way of Mexico—something that his generals had never dreamed of. But far and above all his keen foresight and his remarkable understanding of the manner and of the method of taking hold of the government at a time when failure to appreciate the dangers involved would have wrecked the Union beyond any hope of its ever being saved or united again. The Buchanan administration was dying of inertia, of cowardice and of downright treason. The army was being sent to distant posts; the navy scattered to the four winds of heaven, and the one colossal Southern blunder which has never been explained and which Lincoln could not understand was why Beauregard did not march upon Washington and take possession of the capital. Lincoln said: "If I were Beauregard I would march upon Washington and take possession of it."

In order to counterbalance the mind of the Eastern voters bent on peace at any price, and of the Southern voters bent upon secession, Lincoln's mind travelled to the Middle West and to the Northwest, populated by the great wave of German immigrants who had left Germany after the Revolution of 1848, and whose vote became the decisive factor in the elections of at least six states. Lincoln saw that without that vote he could not hope to win, even if nominated; and it was that vote that Lincoln, the politician, set out to convince and control when the crucial moment should arrive.

Another unpublished document of Lincoln's shows us clearly that Lincoln himself financed the establishment of a German paper in Springfield. Aside perhaps from Dr. Lieber, Dr. Theodore Canisius of Springfield was one of the ablest journalists and publicists of his day, and just as Lincoln picked Seward and Chase and Wells and Fessenden and Grant and Sheri-

dan, when the time came to pick, he chose Dr. Canisius to edit the paper which was to educate and influence the entire German-American vote of that generation. Lincoln paid for the type, the printing presses and the paper, and arranged with Dr. Canisius to publish weekly, if not daily, a newspaper in which the Republican platforms of 1858 and 1860 were to be supported—to be published in the German language. And as long as the paper supported the Republican platforms the plant and the profits were to belong to Dr. Canisius; but should the paper depart from that policy he, Abraham Lincoln, was empowered by an instrument in writing and under seal, prepared by Lincoln, the lawyer, to take possession of the plant and eject an editor even of the standing of Dr. Canisius, should he fail or falter in his support of the Republican platform.

In other words, Lincoln did not hesitate to use every legitimate means of accomplishing and bringing about his purpose—the saving of the Union. He allowed a perfect storm of criticism about his methods to blow over his head from the Northern Copperhead press and from the Southern pro-slavery press, while he serenely pursued his purposes and his policies undisturbed by any such, to him, unimportant criticism. And yet he regarded the dissatisfaction and criticism of a man like Henry Ward Beecher; for upon the word of Dr. Hillis we have it that he called on Beecher and walked the floor of the library all night until he convinced Beecher that he, Lincoln, was right and that Beecher was mistaken, and after that visit Beecher performed such wonderful service by keeping England out of the fray that Lincoln finally said, when he requested Beecher to raise the flag over a recaptured Fort Sumpter at the conclusion of the great war, that but for Beecher there would have been no flag to raise.

Nor did Lincoln ever fear or care for any criticism in filling political positions. He consulted the leaders of his party in the different states as to appointments that were to be made and he believed, and believed to the full extent, in the prin-

ciple that those who were able and willing and requested by the party to preach the party principles, were deserving of being called into power to help carry out those party principles. He did not believe in having one class of men do the work of organizing the party in the different parts of the country, of conducting the campaigns and winning the elections and then dismissing that entire army of party workers in order to put in office a few favorites of fortune or a few social climbers who came well recommended for such positions after the others had done the fighting and achieving the victory at the polls. While he did not carry the principle quite as far as did that other intrepid spirit, Andrew Jackson, who was firm in the belief that if there were a position in the Federal service which could not be filled by a member of his own party that position, in his opinion, had better be abolished, he did follow the Jacksonian principle of rewarding the able party workers of his day; and hence we find his neighbor and his friend, David Davis, on the Supreme Court bench by his appointment, Speed in the Cabinet, Holt in the Judge Advocate's office, as well as every other leader who had anything to do with bringing about Lincoln's nomination and Lincoln's election either the first or the second time, rewarded in one form or another by being called into the service of the government.

A great deal of criticism was current at the time that Lincoln spent so much time with filling offices; we forget that with Buchanan's exit the Democratic Party practically became defunct, and with its Southern leaning and Copperhead tendencies, it was not to be entrusted with the continued conduct of the government, and Lincoln could not and should not have permitted any of them to remain in office in order to conspire with their Southern friends and succeed in making Lincoln's task insuperable, if not impossible of accomplishment. If ever a President was called upon to make a clean sweep and to make an entirely new series of appointments in every position within his gift, it was Lincoln who was compelled so

to do, and he filled almost every position with a member of the new Republican Party which had worked for him and won the great victory of 1860.

Of course, the patriotic section of the Democratic Party which had moved into the new Republican Party headed by men like Chase, Wells and Elair, were appointed for the purpose of cementing the fusion and union between what was left of the Democratic Party and the new Republican Party.

Lincoln cared nothing for the cavil and for the hypocrisy of those who found fault with him for spending his time about filling of offices while the fate of the Republic was hanging in the balance. Strange as it may seem, and in spite of this thorough house-cleaning inaugurated and accomplished by Lincoln, he had more than sufficient time to build up an army and navy and to formulate a plan of campaign which ultimately paralyzed and destroyed the Confederacy, while in glaring contrast the Confederacy was manned by the aristocracy of the land, the motley group of statesmen, soldiers, sailors, teachers, legislators and volunteers who followed their uncouth and humble spokesman made a much better showing from every conceivable standpoint than did the compact organization of their opponents. Losses there were, defeats there were, heartaches and despair hovered above the banners of the Union for well nigh three years, but Lincoln's grip of steel upon his own party and upon the entire North was the only thing that saved us from the dismal prospect of disunion, dismemberment and destruction.

One by one this inspired politician from the Middle West picked up the severed threads of the Union, repaired something here, healed something there, supplied the missing organizer, restorer, reconstructor and upbuilder in every part of the Union; wrote thousands of letters to friends and foes of the Union in every part of the country, and how those letters killed and chilled conspiracy and treason and how they thrilled and encouraged and helped the friends of the Union! And in this manner this politician who organized his

campaigns for the Assembly, his successful campaign for a Congressional nomination, this politician who debated up and down Illinois with the leader of the United States Senate, practiced his political principles in the same manner, without any change until he surrounded himself and until he mobilized the most remarkable aggregation of statesmen, of soldiers, of financiers, and of journalists to his task—of saving and reconstructing the Union, a feat which has not been approximated by any other of our twenty-eight Presidents.

Every now and then one of our Lincoln Day orators, one of our statesmen in responsible positions, asks: "What would Lincoln do if he were here today?" An answer to that question has been attempted a great many times, but very few answers have been given in the light of Lincoln's performances. The sad and distressing phase about the whole thing seems to be that all those who ask the question studiously refrain from reading Lincoln's speeches and letters—those intensely human documents. They refrain from studying his political acts and performances. If they but knew his letters, his addresses, if they but studied his performances, the answer would be evident. Lincoln certainly would not divide his followers into patricians and plebians. Lincoln certainly would not divide the voters of this country or the political organizations of this country into a fighting organization and into an office-holding organization. The man who would fight the battles of the Republic; the man who would preach Lincoln's doctrine would not be disqualified by his preachment from carrying out Lincoln's policies in office. Put more concretely, men like Governors Andrew, Curtin, Buckingham, Todd and Morten, Senators Fessenden, Chase and Trumbull, who were the ablest preachers of Lincoln's doctrines, were not disqualified from holding office but were urged to remain in office and continue their preaching of Lincoln doctrines from the vantage point of political office.

A political leader with Abraham Lincoln was a man to be considered and consulted. Read the letters to Thurlow

Weed, to Senator Cameron, to Lyman Trumbull, to Hannibal Hamlin and to a host of others. And it goes without saying that the political party today which practices that sane and practical political principle of Abraham Lincoln's, of having the preachers of political policy become the performers in office, that party succeeds and continues to succeed; but the party which has one portion do the work of electing and then is made to make way for people unheard of until after election, and who by some necromancy convince or bedevil the appointing power that they, and not the workers, should fill the offices; the party which practices this false political principle fails at succeeding elections and continues to go down to defeat until it ceases to be a factor; for it does not deserve to live.

And when the political leader nowadays asks: "What would Lincoln do if he were here today?" we can tell him, without any fear of contradiction, that Lincoln would do just that—reward the deserving political worker with political preferment after he had participated and made possible the victory of the party.

Different panaceas for eliminating corruption in high places received but scant consideration from that direct political descendant of old Samuel Adams, who said: "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." And if Lincoln could busy himself with politics every day of the year he could see no reason why others should not do the same thing. Lincoln believed in a trained political party—lieutenants who would not only appreciate the principles the party stood for but who were trained and prepared to carry out those party principles in such a manner as would result in strengthening the Union. Political volunteers to him were as good and as bad as volunteers in the army who came for thirty or sixty days and whose one thought during their period of volunteering was the anxiety to return home. It was only after the army was drilled and trained and made permanent that victories were made possible.

And if Lincoln were here today he would preach and practice that only

trained political leaders are worth any thing in our body politic and that the volunteers of a week or ten days before election for the purpose of filling the offices, if successful, would make no impression upon that master politician today any more than they would have in his own time.

The questioner as to what Lincoln would do on different occasions might well be answered by referring him to what Lincoln said and did. His tariff policy was clear and made clear by the tersest and cleanest statement. What would Lincoln have done about National Defense and National participation in international affairs? The answer to the first question can be found in the fact that he organized the greatest army and navy any country ever had up to his day. And the other question, which so many have attempted to answer for him, can easily be answered by anyone who knows what a firm believer Lincoln was in the Declaration of Independence, in the policies of Washington and Jefferson and Marshall as to the duties and as to the functions of our country among the nations of the world; and it is little less than sacrilege for anyone to say that Lincoln would have advocated entry of our country into the League of Nations and thus become subordinated and lost in the babel of voices and vortex of selfish passions which dominate and rule that incongruous institution. Lincoln knew well what the Christian statesmen of England were attempting to do with the help of the diplomats of France and the other countries on the Continent. Gladstone and Palmerston and Russell and the vast majority of the English and French intelligencia were ready to gloat over the destruction of the Union, and came within a hair's breadth of realizing their ardent hopes and ambitions. For anyone to say that Father Abraham would have consented to have his country, his United States, have one voice among fifty-two others, one voice against fifty-two others in a league which is represented by an overwhelming majority of peoples—primitive, selfish, under-educated and unprin-

cipled in their diplomacy—for any man to imagine that Abraham Lincoln would have ever exposed the country for which he fought and died to the ipse dixit of an institution of this kind, sprung into being in the last moments of the expiring Versailles Conference which met in a spirit of revenge, which acted in the spirit of a conqueror over the vanquished, which tried to extract from a conquered foe the penalties of wars and of differences of centuries, has not read and has not understood the words of Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln never believed in the principle of *voï victis*—woe to the conquered—and it was from that atmosphere that the League of Nations sprang. That alone would have made it impossible for a man of the mighty toleration, of the great love, of the great heart of Abraham Lincoln, to participate in any such conference or become a member of the offspring of such a conference.

To anyone who has read his letters and his addresses on reconstruction of the conquered South, to anyone who knows that he had nothing but the hand of fellowship for Lee, for Davis, for Benjamin and for Johnson, if they but subscribed to the oath of fealty, it is unthinkable to believe that Lincoln would have become a partner in the bloody military cabals of the Balkan States and their European co-conspirators among the greater powers who control them.

If Lincoln were alive today and in a position of power he would prevent the contamination of the United States by union with people who thrive on war, who believe in war, who prepare for war, who pray for war and whose business is war. He would not have permitted the union of his country with people who do not believe in religious tolerance and in the equality of man. Lincoln had a peculiar method of minding his own affairs and of having the United States mind its own affairs, and he would have actually advocated the principle of educating America first and enlightening America first, of saving America first, and of making the people of America respected by being tolerant to the stranger in their

midst, before he would move to participate in the business of any other country or any other nation. He would have been adamant on the question of the Monroe Doctrine and would not have thrown it into the ever-boiling cauldron of European politics. He would have been a mighty helper in the struggle between capital and labor; he would have been a tower of strength for the oppressed of every nationality. He would have laughed out of existence secret organizations as inimical to our form of Government, and would have led them all into the temple of the Union where all are equal, where all have equal opportunity, and he would have pointed to himself as he often did when he told that every soldier's boy had the same chance that his father's boy if only given an opportunity; and it might have been his life's work had he been spared from the bullet of the assassin to give every child of this broad land that opportunity. He would not have made a mockery of the majesty of the law by enforcing one law and neglecting others. He would have continued to act with malice towards none and charity to all.

And to those who are discontented with limiting the sphere of action of our great Emancipator and are bound to make him

a citizen of the world, I have but to say that his resplendent example alone will suffice for those other nations of the world who would have some of his glory and who would have a share in his great heritage which he left to all the children of men, and like the great Jewish law giver of old, we can say of him, with the poet of the Centenary:

" . . . he is more than ours as we are more

Than yet the world dares dream. His stature grows

With that illimitable state

Whose sovereignty ordains no tribute shore,

And borderland of hate,

But grounds its justice in the joy it sows,

His spirit is still a power to emancipate

Bondage—more base, being more insidious,

Than serfdom—that cries out in the midst of us

For virtue, born of opportunity,

And manhood, weighed in honest human worth,

And freedom, best in labor. He stands forth

'Mongst nations old—a new-world Abraham,

The patriarch of peoples still to be . . ."



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